

Cold North Wind  
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Cold North Wind

A/N: Do you ever spontaneously find yourself feels-deep in a fandom you had previously only had a passing interest in? And suddenly found yourself hardcore shipping something that in the past you'd only regarded as adequately adorable? \*\*I'M WRITING FIC FOR THIS Y'ALL THAT'S HOW YOU KNOW IT'S SERIOUS\*\*\*\*  
><strong>

Takes place immediately following HTTYD2. I've proofread this thing so many times I've probably gotten used to the mistakes by now so as always point out any and all typos and you'll be my new best friend.

Title is a reference to the movie Chocolat. oneshot \*\*HTTYD2 SPOILERS. LIKE ALL THE SPOILERS\*\*

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><p><span><em>Cold North Wind<em>

Valka's homecoming is somehow exactly like she always pictured it, and nothing like it at all.

She'd always believed her return must somehow involve destruction and desolation brought by a battle between man and dragon; one where she would see her son, Stoick made over, bruised and bloodied but victorious.

She just hadn't quite imagined it like this.

Berk's new chief stands smiling at his cheering people, a dragon not crushed under his heel but at his side, insistently nudging his hand and grinning that funny gummy lopsided grin. Hiccup may have been more Stoick in spirit than he would ever like to admit, but Valka would never have pegged the lean leggy youth as Stoick's son if she hadn't already known it.

There's ice everywhere instead of fire, and more than a few houses leveled, but there is also color. There are carvings of Nadders and Terrors and indistinct beasts decorating every home and statue. And there are dragons. Everywhere, all around, dragons. Vikings who she had watched slay dragons, Vikings who she knew had lost limbs and loved ones to dragons, now she watched embrace the beasts with tears of joy.

Her wee babe had done all that.

The wee babe she'd abandoned had done all that.

He turns and looks at her now, smile wide and filled with the sort of naïve unconditional love that comes only from a child who still sees his mother as that warm presence that gave him life. What matters to him now is that he has her back after twenty years of wanting. He will find time for the anger later.

His smile changes when he directs it at the young blonde woman who has hooked her arm through his. His eyes crinkle and he gives her a look full of tenderness and adoration that Valka recognizes immediately as love. Not that she's surprised, exactly. It'd been clear from the moment the girl was within ten feet of him that she and Hiccup were close, and it had answered more than a few questions when he'd kissed her in front of the whole village. (Stoick had done that to her once, when they were young and drunk and she was terribly shy. She'd slapped him for it, then kissed him again.)

"Okay, Gobber, Fishlegs, rally all the boulder class dragons you can, we need to see about cracking some of the ice over there!"

No sooner has Hiccup begun to bark out orders over the cleanup has Gobber thrown a half-hammered arm over his shoulder and announced that Berk had more than enough experience in cleaning up after a catastrophe, and that after the day he'd had the new chief had earned himself some time to rest. And to grieve, though Gobber doesn't say it aloud.

Hiccup protests but in the end the blonde girl drags him away, proclaiming her agreement with Gobber, and it's clear Hiccup can't deny her anything. Valka looks around her as the village starts to disperse. She can see old friends and acquaintances, but for the moment can't quite wrap her head around the idea of greeting them. She'll have to tell the same story a score or two and she's too tired for it today. She's already seen a few faces light up in recognition and it fills her with an odd sense of dread. Valka's grown accustomed to interacting with dragons; people are another story entirely. She's saved from the awkward position of standing there with no idea what to do by Hiccup's voice.

"Mom!" he shouts, and she looks up to see him, flanked by the girl and Toothless. "You coming home or what?" She nearly laughs in relief. Home. What a strange concept after all this time. They wait

for her as she approaches, and she runs a hand over Toothless's head rather than analyze too closely the hand her son has planted firmly on the girl's waist. Back at her sanctuary, among the dragons, she had felt so comfortable asking to be a part of his life again. Here, on Berk, surrounded by his friends and the villagers and with his girlfriend by his side (FiancÃ©e? Lover? Wife even? No, surely he'd have mentioned sooner if he was married.), Valka feels like she's intruding on something. On a life he had happily built without her.

They walk in silence, save for Toothless, who warbles cheerfully at her as she scratches his ears. There's a squawk from behind her and Valka turns to see a Nadder looking down at her.

"Oh, are you feeling left out?" Valka reaches up to scratch behind the Nadder's spikes, and she grumbles a low roar in thanks.

"You really have a way with them," the blonde girl says, peering around Hiccup's shoulder. "Stormfly doesn't usually warm up to people that quickly. She tends to be a bit testy at first."

"Wonder where she gets that from," Hiccup says, which earns him a punch in the arm. "No, seriously, Astrid, I wonder, because clearly she didn't get it from youâ€"" Another punch. They break off into giggles.

"She's beautiful," Valka says, as Stormfly catches sight of the light glinting off someone's armor and chases it ahead of them. "Like her rider."

A self-conscious hand reaches for a blonde braid. "Uh, thank you."

Hiccup smiles at her again. He seems to do a lot of that where this girl is concerned. They catch each other's eye and Astrid stops her nervous fiddling. She's wary around her, Valka can tell. Meeting one's lover's parents was difficult enough when said parents hadn't been missing for two decades. Astrid doesn't seem quite sure what to make of her.

They're far from the hubbub of people and dragons beginning to haul wood and ice from atop buildings, and Valka notices Hiccup suddenly wince. She's about to ask if he's injured when Astrid beats her to it. "You okay?"

Hiccup nods, though he leans more heavily on her for a moment before Toothless is raising his head under his arm to help support him. "Yeah, I've just been on it way too much today."

They're talking about his leg, Valka realizes belatedly, looking down at where flesh and bone ends and wood and metal begins. She'd nearly forgotten he had the thing. The further they get the more Hiccup seems to lean on Toothless, and Valka realizes that his pain isn't getting worse; he's just getting further from eyes to see it. Hiding his weakness to keep from worrying his people; she wonders if he knows just how like Stoick he really is.

The thought and loss hit her in time with her first glimpse of the house her son had grown up in. It's been completely rebuilt at least once since she last called it home, but she can easily picture Stoick

raising their son in it.

The homecoming she'd pictured had always included Stoick.

Hiccup too seemed to have realized that he would never see his father inside those walls again, for he stalls outside for a moment, simply looking at the house.

It's Astrid who urges them on. She pulls Hiccup forward gently, and he opens the door and turns back to his mother with a smile that manages not to be completely forced. "Well, welcome home, I guess."

Toothless nudges her inside and the others follow, except for Stormfly and Cloudjumper, both too large, who have settled for playing some sort of game involving a butterfly outside.

The exterior of the house may be different, but the inside is full of things she remembers. She sees mementoes, weapons, bits of pottery and wall tapestries; it feels strangely like being home and not being home at all. The room instantly warms as Toothless blows fire into the hearth. She catches Hiccup looking at a large pair of boots sitting by the door. "Can I get you anything?" he asks, seemingly for the sake of having something to say, and Valka gives him a reassuring smile. There are so many things to deal with, but they are all too tired to deal with them.

"I'm fine."

"Are you sure? I could get you some-"

"You're not getting anyone anything," Astrid says firmly, shoving Hiccup into a chair. "Your leg needs rest."

"I can still get up and-"

"Sit."

"I'm the host and you're my guests so—" Valka watches as Astrid navigates the room, grabbing various items and occasionally pausing to push Hiccup back into his chair.

"Hiccup, we're hardly guests. She's your mother and I know my way around your house as well as my own.

Sit."

"But—"

"Toothless?"

Hiccup starts to rise again but Astrid shoves him back and a large black head plops down on his lap with the deep rumbling bark that passes for dragon laughter. He frowns and shoots Valka a look. "Well how do you like that? My first day on the job and already, mutiny."

Valka laughs as she sheds her armor and sinks into a chair. Her chair. It's been repainted and she's surprised it's still standing, but she recognizes the carvings on the arms. Her father had made this for them as a wedding gift. The carved arches at the side slid out

and under to turn it into a rocking chair. She'd spent hours upon hours rocking Hiccup in this chair, just staring down at him and praying to the gods that he'd live.

"You know, Hiccup, you haven't even properly introduced us yet," she says, watching with a smile and carefully shuttered curiosity as Astrid returns with a small tub of water and a linen sheet. Toothless slides his head off Hiccup's lap and blows hot air against the side of the tub and steam rises off the top.

"Well there hasn't really been time yet." Astrid pauses in lifting a basket of fish for Toothless, looking suddenly shy. Hiccup grins at her. "Astrid, Valka. Mom, Astrid." Astrid, seemingly at a loss as to what else to do, gives her an odd sort of half-curtsey.

"Astrid," Valka says, giving the girl the most inviting smile she can. "I remember the naming ceremony for a baby named Astrid. Beautiful little girl. I remember thinking that she was the prettiest babe I'd ever seen. Until a few months later, of course," she adds, turning her smile to her son, who turns pink and busies himself untucking his trousers from the socket of his metal leg. She looks back at Astrid. "Can't say I remember whose child you were, though."

"Ingrid and Codlump Hofferson," she answers, tossing some fish out the window to Stormfly and Cloudjumper.

Valka nods. She remembers now; Ingrid had darker features than her daughter but she could see the resemblance of the young woman before her to the round eyed girl who'd presented her baby to Stoick to be officially welcomed into the tribe all those years ago. "I should have known by that fearless look in your eyes. Astrid Hofferson."

"It'll be Haddock at the end of the summer," Hiccup says, glancing up from unstrapping his leg.

Valka's eyes widen. She looks from one to the other. "Haddock? You two are engaged?" Hiccup and Astrid's eyes meet and the grin they share is so warm and bright the fire pales in comparison.

"Well, unofficially," Hiccup says, and Astrid rolls her eyes.

"Unofficially?"

"You're getting a proper proposal one day whether you like it or not."

"You've not proposed? Is it not all settled? Has a contract been arranged yet?"

Astrid is shaking her head with an exasperated sort of smile as she removes her hood and shoulder armor and starts to unhook Toothless's saddle. "Oh no, it's all settled, someone is just being a stickler for tradition."

Hiccup laughs as he sets his prosthetic to the side and stretches out a leg that ends just below the knee. It's not an uncommon injury for a Viking, but it's her son, and Valka's chest tightens anyway. "Okay,

okay, see, here's how the conversation goes," he pauses in unhooking the leather armor from his arms and starts to twirl a short strand of hair around his finger. " 'Hiccup! It's been five years!' " He demands in a brazen falsetto that has Astrid immediately glaring at him. " 'Are you going to marry me or not?' And then I say-"

" 'Oh, what? No, no, I mean yeah, I mean, am I babbling again? I mean yes, I definitely mean yes, I definitely, I mean, someday, yeah.' " Toothless rolls onto his back laughing as Astrid babbles on in a nasally voice with her shoulders bouncing.

Hiccup drops out of character to frown at her. "Okay, seriously, I do not sound like that! And the arm thing again! Why do you keep doing that thing with my arms? I do not do that thing with my arms!" Hiccup insists, doing exactly that thing with his arms.

"I'm afraid you rather do, dear," Valka tells him, and receives a deadpan frown in return.

"Anyway," Hiccup straightens up and resumes his Astrid impersonation, " 'Someday? What do you mean by someday, someday soon? I need to get started on bossing you around forever!' "

" 'Uh, someday soon, yeah, why not, I'm good with someday soon.' "

" 'Okay good, when?' "

" 'Uh, well, I think I can make time in my busy schedule of being a doofus to squeeze in a wedding next summer.' "

"That's not what I said!"

"It's basically what you said!"

"No, I said 'End of the summer? Isn't that usually when weddings are?' and you said, 'Good, go tell your dad so he can start planning the month-long feast he'll want to throw us to celebrate and then go ask my dad how many sheep I'm worth.' And then you punched my arm and left."

"I did no such thing!"

"Okay, you didn't punch my arm."

"Thank you."

"It might've been my chest."

"Hiccup!"

"Or maybe you slapped my back really hard, I don't remember, point is there was some kind of aggressive physical contact that was not a kiss and it was the exact opposite of romantic and I just stood there wondering how crazy I had to be to feel so excited at the prospect of spending the rest of my life putting up with your abuse."

Astrid smacks the back of his head. "Just shut up and stick your leg in the tub before I pour it over your head."

"So demanding," Hiccup mutters, but even as he says it he's smiling

at her like she's the best thing in the world. He squeezes his eyes shut as he slides his stump into the water, but after a moment his face relaxes and he sighs in relief. "I've got to make a few more adjustments to the fitting. I've got to find some way to insulate it better so it's more comfortable to walk on, but not so cushioned that I can't feel the bite against the bone when the flight gears shift."

"I'm sure you'll figure it out," Astrid says, curling up on his lap and resting her head on his shoulder. "And then you'll start tinkering trying to improve it until you make it uncomfortable again and start the cycle all over."

"How did it happen?" Valka asks, partly out of curiosity and partly to remind the two that she's still there.

"Oh you know," Hiccup says casually, "Fell into the blazing inferno of a dying Red Death who was burning up from the inside out. Toothless saved me. Well," he smiles at the dragon, who warbles affectionately in return, "Most of me anyway." He notices Valka's worried eyes and his expression turns serious. "It's been five years, Mom; I'm used to it now. Besides, I went from Berk's walking disaster to kind of a war hero, so I think a leg is a pretty good trade off." She doesn't return his smile.

Five years. He's trying to make her feel better but it's only making her feel worse. Five years. Gods, he battled a leviathan dragon at fifteen. And if the way Astrid remains silent and holds him a little tighter is any indication, he came close to losing much more than his leg. And losing a leg at only fifteen, Thor almighty, so young. He'd had a birthmark on that foot; light in color and almost imperceptible to most, but obvious to her. Fifteen years old, going to war on dragon back, recovering from the loss of a limb, and where had she been to nurse him back to health?

Many times over the years she's felt the guilt for abandoning them, even if she felt it was for the best, but all that time her guilt had been abstract; seeing him here in front of her she feels burdened more with the weight of all she's missed.

Valka had been prepared to never see her baby again.

She had not been prepared to see him all grown up.

"Did it hurt? Was it bad?" she asks, not really wanting to know, but feeling that she deserved to know the extent of his pain, the extent of her neglect.

Hiccup shrugs, though carefully so as not to jostle Astrid. "If it did I don't remember. I was out cold for days." He reaches out with his whole foot and uses his toes to scratch at the ears of the sleepy dragon currently fighting very hard to keep his eyes open.

"Apparently it didn't look that bad, though. They didn't even have to amputate. The fire burned the whole thing off, cauterized the wound, deadened the nerve endings for a while." Toothless purrs in a low rumble and finally lets his eyes droop closed. "One minute I'm flying towards a giant club of a tail, the next, I'm waking up in my bed with a peg leg."

Hiccup sounds utterly nonchalant about the whole thing, but Valka

sees the distant look in Astrid's eyes and wonders. Toothless starts to snore softly and Hiccup lowers his good leg and after a moment his own eyes are fluttering closed.

"You need to take your leg out of the bath. If you let it get all pruny you'll end up with blisters again."

"Too tired to care."

Astrid rolls her eyes and sits up. She lifts his leg out of the water and dries it carefully before pushing the bucket aside and settling back against Hiccup's shoulder.

"You don't have to do that," he says sleepily.

"I'm being doting and wifey. Shut up and enjoy it. Or do you prefer the days when I used to beat you up?"

"You still beat me up," Hiccup protests without opening his eyes. "You're just more apologetic later." Astrid punches his arm and Hiccup groans. "Aaand this is why I've had the same bruise for five years."

Valka smiles as she watches them, young and in love and utterly comfortable in each other's presence. Astrid is twisting a few strands of Hiccup's hair into a braid while his hand traces lazy circles against her hip. They all fall into a happy tired silence and after a while Valka takes to stroking the head of a Terrible Terror that appears out of nowhere on the arm of her chair. ("Don't worry, he does that to everyone," Astrid assures her.) Eventually Hiccup's hand stills on Astrid's hip and his breathing steadies. Valka finds herself too exhausted to sleep; everything still feels strange here, in this house that looks so much and yet so little like the one she left behind. But it's soothing having a dragon in her arms; it takes off some of the edge.

"It was terrible." Valka looks up and finds Astrid still wide awake. She has that distant look in her eyes again, like she's not seeing anything in the room. "He doesn't remember so everyone agreed it was best not to tell him." She swallows and continues in a voice absent of the brazen confidence Valka has heard thus far, "The fire cauterized most of the wound so there wasn't any risk of infection or blood loss, but his leg wasn't completely gone. There was just thisâ€¦hunk of charcoal in the shape of the bone. They went to take it off and it just sort ofâ€¦crumbled away. Left all this burned up skin behind. They cut some of it away but for the most part the job was already done. Nothing to do but bandage him up and treat the burns." She raises her head to look at the side of Hiccup's face, one hand absently stroking at his jaw. "Gobber must have dragged me kicking and screaming out of the room five times but I wanted to be there. After I took an axe to the door they just gave up and let me stay. I just didn't want to be away from him." She closes her eyes and presses her forehead into his cheek. "There'd been a minute there where we thought—" she breaks off, her voice cracking. There's a deep breath and then, barely audible, "It took us a minute to realize that Toothless had saved him." Valka understands the implication, and for a moment feels selfishly thankful she hadn't been there for that.

"I used to have nightmares about it," Astrid continues. "I'd go back to that moment and I'd forget that I knew he was really okay. I

always thought he was kind of an idiot, and I'd just started to realize that he was the bravest, sweetest, craziest idiot I'd ever met, and now he was gone." She opens her eyes and a smile creeps on to her face as she looks at Hiccup. "And then I'd see him the next morning, alive and completely oblivious to how much the thought of losing him scared me that out of the blue some days I'd kiss him and some days I'd punch him and I'm not sure which one confused him more." Her eyes are sliding closed, a soft smile on her face.

"You'll make a good wife to him," Valka says, and Astrid blinks her eyes open. "And a good wife for a chief. You're as strong and capable as you are beautiful, and that's saying something." Astrid blushes. "You're what he needs, and more importantly you're what Berk needs. He can do this job, but he doesn't believe it yet and he's going to need help. You hold him up, you look after him, and you love him. I couldn't ask for anything more for him."

Astrid smiles. "Thank you."

She falls asleep after that, curled up in Hiccup's arms, and Valka watches them with guilt tinged with something almost akin to jealousy. She's his mother, for Thor's sake, she should have been there to comfort him, to hold him up and support him while the rest of the village thought him useless. She should have been there to take care of him, to protect him, to love him.

But she hadn't been. And now she was here and he was all grown up and he'd found someone who could love him and look after him and he didn't need her anymore. She's happy for him, gods is she happy for him, but the guilt remains all the same.

x

She doesn't remember falling asleep. There's a vague memory of being carried, half asleep, and put to bed, accompanied by the soft thunk of metal on wood and a voice telling her she was fine and to go back to sleep. She wakes in the middle of the night in an unfamiliar room in an unfamiliar bed surrounded by a smell so familiar her heart aches and she nearly sobs right then at the unfairness of it all. Twenty years on and Stoick still smells the same, the scent heavy on his pillow and blankets and permeating the air in the room. The loss hits her hard, suddenly, like hitting the ground after an unexpected crash landing. The house is silent all around her, so she buries herself in blankets that smell like her husband and cries.

x

It's very early the next morning when she awakes. Outside she can see dawn just beginning to break and a few villagers starting to trickle out of their homes. She steps out of the bedroom to find Toothless still asleep, hanging from the rafters by the hearth. She climbs the stairs to the loft quietly; it's unlikely Hiccup would leave without his dragon. She reaches the top of the stairs and sees Hiccup still asleep, his back to her; there's a slender arm curled around his shoulder whose hand has fisted a handful of his tunic and she knows he's not alone. Valka turns to leave and the stair creaks loudly underfoot. She glances back, but Hiccup merely rolls over onto his back and pulls Astrid closer before stilling. He'd been crying at some point; his eyes were still puffy and swollen. As much as it

still hurts to lose him again, she's had twenty years to grow accustomed to Stoick's absence. Hiccup has never known life without him.

\_Why? \_She prays silently. \_Half a day of a family that's whole. Why would you do that to him?\_

She receives no answer. The gods can be cruel, but whether they are cruel or kind they are always silent.

x

The grief comes in bursts. Hiccup throws himself into his new role as chief with a gusto no one knew him capable of feeling for a job he's never wanted. But it serves as a distraction, and between the village, Toothless, and Astrid he's got enough distractions to function something approaching normally.

He works tirelessly to put Berk to rights. There's rebuilding to do, and new dragons to house, and on top of it all there's still everyday village matters to attend to. He's not Stoick, but he's starting to learn that no one really expects him to be. In Hiccup's eyes he is The New Chief: Stoick's son. In the Berkians' eyes, he is The New Chief: Hiccup, the boy who brought peace between dragons and Vikings to Berk. He's often as unconventional in his methods as chief as he's ever been in anything else, but everyone's used to it by now. He's better at the job than he realizes, and he devotes himself wholeheartedly to it.

And at the end of most days he's too exhausted to cry.

He does, eventually. Odd hours left alone or moments when the stress starts to get to him he finally breaks down. Sometimes Astrid will comfort him, sometimes Valka will. But he allows Valka to comfort him only if she is nearby when he crashes. It's Astrid he seeks out when he feels the pain coming.

She tries not to take it too personally. She may be his mother, but he hardly knows her and she hardly knows him. She loves him to her bones, but she loves him as her son; as the boy who takes after her and who valued the life of a dragon over salvaging his honor as a Viking. She doesn't quite love him as Hiccup yet. But she's learning. \_They're \_learning. He's not used to having a mother, and, she discovers, he's not entirely used to having a parent who so completely accepts him for everything he is.

She could slap Stoick, she could, for how he treated their son, even knowing she's done no better. Stoick spent fifteen years either pushing him into a mold he didn't fit or ignoring or berating him when he failed to conform to said mold. And as much as it angers her, Valka knows it only happened because she wasn't there to stop it, and therefore she's got no right to be any angrier at Stoick than she is at herself. They both failed their boy, but she takes some solace in knowing that he might not have become everything he is if they hadn't. He might never have shot down Toothless; he might never have changed Berk. She reminds herself of that, and doesn't allow herself to venture any further into the land of what could have been.

She learns Hiccup spent fifteen years as an outcast; too weak to fight and too troublesome to stay out of the fight anyway. She learns

he has a sharp tongue and a sharper mind that he armored himself with against the scorn of his people and the ostracization of the other children. She learns that what he lacked in brawn he made up for in intellect and creativity that excelled in Gobber's forge. She learns he's stubborn and a bit reckless. She learns he's left-handed. She learns he can't hold his mead.

She learns that twenty years is an awful long time to miss.

He's a man grown, but sometimes she forgets just how grown.

Until one evening when she cuts her end of the day flight short and climbs the stairs to his room to ask him something, and catches a glimpse of slender arms clinging to his bare back before they're jolting apart and Astrid is yanking the blankets up to cover herself.

"M-mom!" he stutters, breathless and bright red as he stares at her, at a complete loss for words, while beside him Astrid holds the blankets to her neck and studies the floor.

Valka mumbles out an apology and retreats. Cloudjumper has just started to settle in for the night but looks nonetheless thrilled when she climbs on his back and takes to the skies again.

x

He avoids her the whole next day, and it's a further two before he can look her in the eye. The shift in their relationship is palpable, and it's Gobber who finally wheedles out of her what happened.

"Oh, aye," he says, hammering out a metal cap for a Nightmare's broken horn. "I caught them in the back of the workshop a few months back. I'd have thought they'd have learned to be a bit more subtle by now."

"This has been going on for a while, then?" Valka asks. She'd thought perhaps this was a new development; Hiccup seeking comfort after Stoick's death, but apparently not.

Gobber nods. "Since about last Snoggletog, by my estimate. They went missing for a whole day and a half, came back saying they'd gotten stranded by a storm while off working on that map of his." He chuckles. "But they seemed in an awful good mood for two people who'd been stranded during a winter storm, and for a few days there Hiccup was walking around like he'd grown ten feet overnight." He laughs again, but sobers when he sees the look on Valka's face. "Val," he says gently, "He's twenty, he's engaged to be married, and he's been seeing that girl for nigh on five years. It was bound to happen eventually. And aside from that, I seem to remember a lot of afternoons where no one could find where you and Stoick had run off to."

Valka blushes and shoves his shoulder playfully. "I know, I know," she says, and she does. He's not a child, after all, and boys younger than him took girls into their beds. Still. One minute he's her baby, the next he's grown up and back in her arms. The next, he's all grown up and in somebody else's.

x

She was never any good at cooking, but that night she's overcome with the sudden urge to prove herself capable of preparing a meal for her family. Hiccup walks in the door just as she tests the broth she's making and shudders at the taste of it. He smiles.

"Need some help?" She raises an eyebrow and he crosses to the room, picks up a knife, and begins chopping the roots into fine slices. "You wanna get them as thin as possible. It releases more flavor." When she continues to look at him in confusion he clarifies. "Dad could burn water. Someone in this family had to learn how to cook." She laughs, imagining Stoick standing in front of a bowl of flour and scowling at it as if he could will it into bread. She welcomes Hiccup's help and his company after so many days of awkward avoidance. After a few silent moments of work she finally breaches the topic.

"I'm not angry, you know." Hiccup's hands pause for the slightest moment. He doesn't have to ask what she's talking about. "Or disappointed. It's a quirk of our culture that everyone's expected to have done it and yet officially everyone's a virgin on their wedding night." Hiccup still doesn't say anything. "I'm justâ€œit's a bit of a shock, realizing just how grown up y'are. And I suppose I'm just surprised more than anything that your father was alright with it."

Hiccup laughs that shaky, too-high laugh that's a dead giveaway he's lying. "Oh, yeah, well, full of surprises, that's Dad."

There are a lot of things that could be said of Stoick the Vast. 'Full of surprises' had never been one of them.

"He didn't know, did he." It's not a question.

"He'd have skinned me alive."

Valka shakes her head and smiles. "Not that he'd necessarily been wrong to, though."

Hiccup frowns, confused and perhaps a tad bitter as he replies, "I thought you said you weren't angry."

"I'm not," she says, feeling his eyes on her as she chops onions. "What's done is done. I'm just saying he would have had valid reasons beyond just wanting to spoil your fun. What if that girl fell pregnant? Imagine the scandal if the son of the chief fathered a child out of wedlock."

Hiccup splutters. "I-we wouldn't-that's—" He looks properly irked now. "Well," he huffs, "I'm chief now anyway and a hero besides, so I don't think anyone would really care now."

"Illegitimate children can't inherit the chiefdom," she reminds him gently.

His jaw is set. "Yeah well seeing as I'm the chief it's not like I can't change the laws." He chops the head off a fish with far more force than is really necessary.

"Other tribes may not recognize the authority of—"

"I'm not stupid," he interrupts, glaring down at the cod whose bones he's tearing out. "I know most people think I tap danger on the back until it looks me in the eyes but I do think things through." And behind his tone she can hear the boy who spent the first fifteen years of his life being called useless.

"Hiccup—"

"And I really don't need a lecture from someone who hasn't bothered to be there to see what I got up to for the last twenty years."

There it is.

She's been waiting for the resentment to come out, but it doesn't hurt any less to finally hear it.

Almost immediately Hiccup deflates, closing his eyes and sighing. "I'm sorry," he says quietly. "That was uncalled for. I didn't mean it."

"Yes you did."

"No, I didn't," he insists, and looking at him Valka can almost believe it. "I just," he sighs and runs a hand through his hair. "I'm tired," he says. "I'm so tired. And I just—I wish you'd been here, yeah. My whole life would have been different." She looks down. "But, my whole life would have been different." He takes her hand and she looks at him again. There's the smallest smile gracing his lips. "I wouldn't have Toothless; I probably wouldn't have Astrid, who knows if Berk ever would have changed. And—I didn't have you all those years, but I'm glad I have you now." He looks away and swallows.

"Especially since Dad—" he breaks off, blinking. "I'm trying my best, but I always thought, I mean I knew that one day obviously he wouldn't be here anymore, but I just thought," he sniffs and takes a few shallow breaths, tears welling in his eyes faster than he can blink them away, "I just thought he'd at least be there to help me at the beginning, you know? Sh-show me how to do this, but h-h-he's not a-and I, I—" he looks up and reaches for her. "Mom—!"

She pulls him into her arms and he sags against her, face buried in her neck.

x

Summer ends, and she gives him away gladly.

If there's one thing Vikings know how to do it's throw a party, and there's no bigger Viking party than a wedding. The sky is filled with dragonfire and flower petals as every living being on Berk comes together to celebrate.

Normally it's the chief's job to officiate weddings, but today he's had to outsource that duty to Gobber, who just barely gets through the words without outright sobbing. Crying at weddings is terribly undignified and un-Viking, but all of Berk seems so relieved to have gotten Hiccup the Formerly Useless successfully to adulthood and to a point where he might continue his family line that there's more than a few teary eyes in the audience.

Well, that and the fact that Astrid may well be the most radiant bride Berk has ever seen.

"Woah, Astrid looks like an actual girl," she hears Tuffnut say when Astrid appears in the center of town, followed by, "OW! Hey!" and Ruffnut's voice,

"I wasn't sure if I should punch you for that or not, so I decided to go with punching."

Valka suppresses a laugh and watches the look of pure awe spread across Hiccup's face, where it remains stubbornly for the rest of the day.

After the vows and the swords and the rings comes more feasting and dancing, because even after a week of it there's still plenty of mead and as long as there is mead there is bound to be merriment. Hiccup dances surprisingly well given his lack of limb; not to say that he dances well, of course, but he is significantly less of a disaster than Valka would have expected as he gleefully twirls his new wife around the Great Hall.

Her heart constricts as the band starts playing their song, hers and Stoick's. She looks down and takes a steady breath before she hears the clearing of a throat and looks up to see her son, his hand outstretched towards her.

She feels lighter than she has in ages, and for the first time since his death the thought of Stoick brings her more joy than pain. They had helped him and failed him in equal measures but between them they'd turned out one pretty good boy. The song ends and she shoves Hiccup back to his bride and takes a seat next to an incredibly inebriated Gobber.

"I al'las knew this day'd come," he's telling Toothless. "Y'know, she'd hic come b'm'shop fer 'er shax sarpenedâ€"axe sharpened. An e'd stare at her and staaare at her. And then he'd drop wa'ever ah had'm workin' on, and probaba-ally break it. But I couldn't get too mad, y'know, acause, well, she'd giv'm this look sometimes, see, like, hic like she thah hew's funny, but dinna wanna shooow it, y'know?" Gobber leans in close to Toothless's face, who shoots Valka a look that seems to be the dragon equivalent of help me. Valka laughs. There was no stopping Gobber once he got drunk and sentimental at weddings. He liked to act tough, but he was a big softy if ever there was one. "An ah juss knew! Y'know? Ah juss knew." He smiled at Valka. "Juss like ah knew wifyou an' Stoick."

She laughs and thinks of her own wedding, and how happy and hopeful she'd been. She'd looked up at Stoick and dreamed of the life they'd have; of growing old together, of the strong heirs she'd give him, of finally convincing him to stop the fighting. She'd dreamt of raising their children in a world where dragons and Vikings were at peace, and of one day dancing with him at their child's wedding.

She'd given up on all of those dreams over the years.

And yet here she was, watching their strong boy prepare to start a family in a world at peace with dragons, and she realizes that just because the gods do not speak, that did not mean they did not

listen.

The gods could be cruel but they could also be kind, and she gives her son to a woman who gives him all the love and support she was never there to give, and while she may dance at his wedding a widow, she dances with dragons as well.

fin

End  
file.